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TITLE: Understanding the relationship between media and HIV Prevention Policy

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ISSUE: HIV/AIDS has become a common subject for mainstream media (e.g., NuShawn Williams, needle exchange), and we know that mainstream media has a tremendous impact on public opinion. Therefore, it is useful to review the coverage of HIV/AIDS issues and determine its effect on subsequent HIV prevention policies. Public health officials and the community needs an understanding of this interaction as they work toward setting HIV prevention policies.

SETTING: Local and national media outlets and local and national health jurisdictions.

PROJECT: To understand this relationship the following information was gathered: (1) A review of items in the print and broadcast media related to HIV prevention over the past year, (2) A review of the letters and comments that media outlets received in response to HIV-related items (3) Interviews with public health officials, journalists, and community members on the recall of media coverage and its perceived effect on HIV prevention policy, (4) A review of actual HIV prevention policies in areas with substantial media coverage.

RESULTS: The project demonstrated that media coverage has a noticeable effect on HIV prevention policy. The effect is to increase interest in the policy and thereby produce more feedback into the creation of the policy. It was also shown that the most favored position in the media/public is often the policy that becomes enacted.

LESSONS LEARNED: Public health officials should be well aware of the implications of media coverage on HIV prevention policy. Therefore, there should be a communication and execution strategy for dealing with the media and HIV prevention issues. This will hopefully, inform the public with the facts, so that subsequent media coverage and public input is consistent with the necessary public health policies.

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